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Driving Change on Twitter: A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis of the Twitter Debates on the Saudi Ban on Women Driving

Lama Altoaimy

Department of Linguistics, College of Languages, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, Riyadh, P.O. Box 84428, Saudi Arabia; Lmaltoaimy@pnu.edu.sa

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Abstract: This paper explores how Twitter has been used in the debate on women's right to drive in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The overarching aim of this investigation is to explain how gender roles and the relationship between the genders are navigated in these debates. For Saudi Arabian women, social media platforms such as Twitter provide a unique space to express opinions and highlight areas of concern in a way that they are unable to in any other public sphere. The exploration of the debate on women's right to drive in the KSA was achieved by collecting a body of tweets in Arabic addressing this topic from the last three months of 2015. Following a corpus-assisted discourse studies approach, this paper analyzes arguments by Twitter users discussing the KSA's ban on women drivers, which may have contributed to women being granted the right to drive and also raised awareness of the restrictions imposed on women.

Keywords: Saudi women; Twitter; women driving; critical discourse studies

1. Introduction

When Saudi Arabian women's rights activist Manal Alsharif used Twitter and Facebook to post a video of herself driving the streets of Khobar in 2011, the world took notice. Her "women2drive" campaign astounded many in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and elicited a forceful response on social media platforms. On Twitter, the debate over women's right to drive has been fierce and Alsharif has received messages of both support and criticism from those who see her behavior as contrary to traditional religious life. However, years later, after more online campaigns, women have been granted the right to drive. Women in the KSA will be issued driver's licenses and will be able to drive starting in June 2018. The change also comes as part of the recent plan known as the Vision 2030 plan to improve the economy and lessen the nation's dependence on oil. Part of this is unlocking women's potentials and enabling them to contribute to the economy. In this study, I focus on the online efforts that have successfully brought awareness to women's issues in the KSA and may have possibly contributed to lifting the ban.

Doumato (2010) and Baeshen (2017) note, no legislation enshrined the ban on women drivers in the KSA in recent years, but refusing women licenses was a practice that was widely accepted and seen as appropriate to the demands of tradition and religion. In 1991, the ban was addressed publicly when several women drove cars to protest it. Their behavior was decried as sinful since driving supposedly allows women to mix with males who are not their relatives and, therefore, constitutes a moral and social ill (AlMunajjed 1997). While the ban has not been addressed publicly since 1991, the Internet and social media have been used to increase awareness of women's rights.

The ban on women driving stems from the KSA's commitment to uphold the strict Wahhabi interpretation of Islam. AlMunajjed (1997) and Doumato (2010) argue that the KSA is unique among

Islamic nations in embracing the Wahhabi doctrine and its severe interpretation of Islamic texts as an ideological basis to bring various tribes in the Arabian Peninsula together into one religious community. According to AlMunajjed (1997) and Al-Fassi (2010), this strict view of Islam has resulted in legislation and norms that segregated genders in schools, placed serious limits on the mobility of women in public and at work, and left women dependent on male relatives to make crucial decisions for them. While for some Saudis the situation is discriminatory towards women, for others it is not. According to this view, as Doumato (2010, p. 425) states, "a healthy majority of Saudi citizens agree with social agenda of the ulema" (religious scholars) and view the limits placed on women "a balance between the rights and duties of men and women as prescribed by Islam and necessary to uphold honor and family values." Such views are also reflected in the dataset by those who oppose women driving. For example, some users indicated that driving is a man's responsibility (e.g., الذين يعلمون قيادة المرأة للسيارة هم ممن لا يستطيعون تحمل مسؤلياتهم كرجال تجاه نساءهم   أغلب الرجال *Most men who teach women how to drive are those who cannot assume their responsibilities as men towards their women*). Others think it is a threat to social morality (e.g., اللهم رد كيد من أراد الفتنه في نحره#قيادة_المرأة_للسيارة *O'God stand against their plans of sedition #women_driving*).

AlMunajjed (1997), Al-Fassi (2010), and Doumato (2010) observe that women are prevented from speaking openly about their frustrations with the limits placed on them since they have no voice in the public sphere. There are few women's organizations and women's behavior is central for family reputation. Therefore, it is typical to see Saudi women portrayed as powerless and inferior to men especially in Western mainstream media. Nevertheless, statistics from the Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority (2017) revealed that younger generations of Saudi women are eschewing traditional gender roles to engage with higher education and professional work. Yamani (2000), Al-Fassi (2010), and Doumato (2010) identify the factors that have improved the situation of women and increased their awareness of their social position. This specifically includes the growth of the KSA's economy, the rise in female literacy and education, the rise in work opportunities for women, and, most importantly, recent reforms to counter religious fundamentalism and terrorism, which have limited the ability of the religious establishment to define gender roles and have granted women more legal capacities, educational and employment options, and political participation.

However, women still face limitations under the law including mobility and travel. These limitations are seen by many as crucial for maintaining the conservative image of the country. Given the lack of organized efforts to improve women's situation in these areas and women's limited access to public means of communication and official discourse, women found refuge in social media through which they can raise their voices and address their limitations and disadvantages. As reported by Poynter (2010), Salter (2013), Castells (2015), and Cover (2015), social media can have a significant impact on social movements and it has allowed Saudi women to be heard in the KSA and worldwide (Al-Rasheed 2013; Doumato 2010). Khamis (2014), Rentschler (2015), Clark (2016), and Newsom and Lengel (2012) emphasize the key role Twitter plays in publicizing women's voices and movements. In particular, Twitter has empowered women to express their opinions and surmount gender-based legislation and norms that exclude them from public and political life since it allows "the exercise of agency by women where previously (at least in modern history) no comparable domain has existed" (Samin 2008, p. 207).

In line with these arguments, this study contributes to the growing body of work exploring the ways social media is employed to support and even shape feminist movements. The focus of this study is the ban on women drivers in the KSA and how Twitter users discursively debate and argue against the ban within the current formations of gender roles. To achieve this, the linguistic choices made in this debate are analyzed to elucidate, as Talbot (2010, p. 16) writes, "the complex part language plays alongside other social practices and institutions in reflecting, creating, and sustaining gender divisions in society." Beyond analyzing the multifaceted ways in which gender roles are constructed and performed in discourse, the discourse's ability to be promulgated effectively must be considered. As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) argue, "the extent to which an individual or a group . . . contributes to meaning depends on their ability to get their contributions heard and attended to

(p. 88)." The proliferation of Twitter worldwide and its ability to give underrepresented groups a public space to express their opinions have led many to conclude that Twitter is an appropriate discursive area for Saudis to explore and challenge gender roles in ways that appear impossible by using any other form of public communication (Almahmoud 2015; Alotaibi 2017; Sahly 2016).

The literature on Twitter has examined the social media platform from the perspective of the public networks and the affiliations users who are able to create posts through Twitter—for example, in the studies of Boyd (2010) and Zappavigna (2012)—and from the perspective of the platform's potential as a mechanism for social activism, which is seen in the work of Keller (2012), Konnelly (2015), and Bonilla and Rosa (2015). The present work follows the lead of this literature but emphasizes the Saudi Arabian context—specifically, gender relations in the KSA, an area of study that is continually developing (Al-Rasheed 2013). While the discourse on the ban on women drivers in the KSA forms the focus of studies by Almahmoud (2015), Sahly (2016), and Alotaibi (2017), the present work distinguishes itself from other studies by adopting a critical feminist perspective and a critical discourse studies (CDS) framework to examine how social media, discourse, and genders interact. In what follows, I start by providing a brief background on the use of Twitter in the KSA. I follow that with presenting the theoretical assumptions that inform this research and then discuss the data and methodological approaches used to perform the analysis. Lastly, the results will be presented and discussed.

2. Twitter in KSA

At the time of writing this study, Twitter, which is a microblogging social media platform that allows users to post 280 character-long messages, is considered one of the most popular social media websites and provides people with a powerful tool to communicate and exchange information. Twitter has been particularly popular in the KSA. Despite being monitored and censored (Noman et al. 2015), it has recently been reported that Saudis are increasingly using Twitter (Mari 2013). In both 2012 and 2013, Saudi Arabia had, proportionately, the greatest number of active users of Twitter, which is growing more rapidly than anywhere else in the world. A 2015 study showed that 5.4 million Saudi Arabians used Twitter with over 210 million tweets a month coming from them (The Social Clinic 2015). Saudis comprise 29% of active Twitter users across the Arab region and are responsible for generating more than 32% of the tweets coming from the Arab region (i.e., Middle East and North Africa) (Salem 2017).

Several different demographics in Saudi use Twitter. It has been reported that 51% of Saudi Arabian Twitter users are female and many of them are young (50% aged 18–34 and 23% aged 34–55) (The Social Clinic 2015). The Saudi Arabian government also participates on Twitter. The present monarch, King Salman, acquired a Twitter account in 2015 and became the first Saudi Arabian monarch ever to speak to his populace through social media (Jones and Omran 2015). The Saudi government has acknowledged how widespread Twitter use is in Saudi with over 90 different official bodies using Twitter to speak directly to citizens and become more transparent (Alasem 2015). Many media organizations, preachers, journalists, politicians, and commentators also use Twitter and communicate to citizens through it (Noman et al. 2015). The popularity of this form of social media has allowed women to articulate and protest their treatment, particularly the restriction of movement that arises from their being banned from driving.

3. Theoretical Background

In this study, I draw on post-structural theories of gender, which address the question of what gender is and how it is made meaningful in very complicated ways. Gender from a post-structural perspective is differentiated from sex where the former refers to the cultural and social norms of femininity and masculinity and the latter refers to the biological differences between males and females based on their reproductive organs (Kimmel 2013; Talbot 2010). While gender may seem to be a set of stable qualities that people acquire during their early childhood socialization, post-structural theories highlight the dynamic nature of gender and its constant enactment and reinforcement in daily interactions and social institutions such as school, family, etc. (Kimmel 2013). According to

Butler (1990, p. 179), gender is a set of "stylized repetitions of acts," which are manifested mainly in discourse. That is, gender and ideas about gender are constructed mainly by the verbal and written discourses of social practices and institutions. Individuals establish their gender identity with reference to discourses that precede them and which delineate the way each sex should be. This is not to say that people are passively guided by these discourses. Rather every individual has the potential to enter into discourse or act in other ways that rejects, adapts, or modifies their gender role (Butler 1990; Kimmel 2013).

Social media due to its different affordances (e.g., anonymity, interactivity, etc.) can be seen as a place where power becomes decentralized and the supremacy of the state and dominant institutions is challenged (Fuchs 2013; Murthy 2013) and a place where women in particular have been able to raise alternative views of gender and identity. Their utilization of social media and their public engagement with women's issues have put them at the forefront of change and publicized their issues in ways that were not possible before social media. Twitter, in particular, has been utilized in online movements to raise awareness of issues such as violence and sexual harassment, which are often misrepresented in mainstream media or deemed by many as belonging to the private sphere (Clark 2016; Khamis 2014; Rentschler 2015). For example, in her study of the hashtag #whyIstayed, Clark (2016) has examined the ways in which Twitter users responded to predominant views about domestic violence. She found that through their online discussions, users were able to redefine their positions and "circulate revised normative interpretations" for the victim-blaming rhetoric that dominates mainstream media (p. 800). In the Arab world, despite women's low literacy level, disadvantaged economic situation, and physical and sexual threats as well as intimidation during the Arab Spring revolutions, their use of social media was very effective in raising women's voices, educating women about their rights, and empowering them with discourses to counter negative practices against them (Khamis 2014; Newsom and Lengel 2012; Radsch and Khamis 2013).

Despite social media's potential to empower women, many have been skeptical about its effect offline. As Newsom and Lengel (2012, p. 38) argue, "agency in these online spaces is temporally situated in the sites and defined from and within the spaces themselves. This type of power is restricted to the gendered space created specifically for that type of power to operate." Nonetheless, Bayat (2007) argues that such online activities should not be overlooked. Acts of resistance by women in the Middle East usually go unnoticed since they do not fit the Western model of what constitutes a social movement. They are usually compared to Western movements that comprise leadership and organized protest, which are privileges that are not accessible to women in the Middle East, whose efforts are usually "thwarted by the repressive measures of authoritarian/patriarchal states as well as the unsympathetic attitudes of many ordinary men" (Bayat 2007, p. 160). Bayat asserts that subtle, everyday acts of resistance such as seeking education and employment are just as powerful. This form of resistance, as Bayat argues, "involves deploying the *power of presence*, the assertion of collective will in spite of all odds, by refusing to exit, circumventing the constraints, and discovering new spaces of freedom to make oneself heard, seen, and felt (p. 161)." This view has important implications for examining how women have used social media in the KSA. Online—and against power structures and the many restrictions and laws that confine their voices to the private sphere—many Saudi women have found a space to transcend gender boundaries, present themselves publicly, and engage in an ideological struggle and discursive arguments in order to deconstruct the rules and laws that limit their lives. Exploring this movement, this study examines Twitter as a discursive space that can enable Saudi women and men to redefine their identities and counteract the dominant discourses that limit their lives. In particular, I examine the kind of discourses and arguments that Twitter users draw on to justify women's right to drive and push for equality.

4. Methodology

To fulfil the aim of the study, a corpus of Arabic Twitter posts or "tweets" was compiled and linguistically analyzed in order to explore the different ways in which Twitter users utilized the

platform to advocate for and support the right of women to drive. The data were analyzed using corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS; Baker 2006, 2010; Partington 2008), which is a discourse analysis approach that combines CDS and corpus linguistics (CL). While CL is used as a method of textual analysis that aids in the analysis of a large number of tweets by using a computer software that "allows the texts to be rapidly searched in order to find, list, sort, and count words, phrases, and grammatical patterns" (Stubbs and Halbe 2013, p. 2). CDS is used to perform an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the corpus tool resulting by relating textual features to the sociocultural, historical, and political contexts in which the text is situated (Fairclough 1992; Reisigl and Wodak 2001; van Dijk 1993). Using a CADS approach has been proven to be highly beneficial in the analysis of data (e.g., Freake et al. 2011; Jaworska 2016), especially Twitter data (Baker and McEnery 2015). In this study, I follow Baker and McEnery (2015) useful approach for unpacking and analyzing the corpus of this study.

The corpus of this study consists of 5876 tweets posted during the months of October, November, and December 2015. The tweets were retrieved using the advanced search option on Twitter, which allows users to search Twitter's database using a specific keyword, time period, location, and more. For this study, I used the Arabic keywords قيادة المرأة (women driving) and specified the periods between October 2015 and December 2015. This time frame seems to provide an informative way to capture the previous discussions since activists increase their social media activities and presence during the anniversary of the driving campaign that started in October 2011. It was also long enough to capture the diverse ways in which this issue has been discussed. The retrieved tweets were then captured using a custom-made scraping tool that allows users to capture all textual data from a Twitter search page and save them in a plain-text file in order to easily load and analyze them in a corpus tool. The web-based corpus tool used in the study was Sketch Engine. The data were analyzed in Arabic by the researcher who is a native speaker of Arabic and familiar with the Arabic language varieties used in the corpus. The examples in this paper were translated into English by the researcher and the translation was verified by a professional translator.

Before processing and analyzing the data using Sketch Engine, the corpus had to be organized. While a small number of misspellings and irregular spellings were fixed during the close textual analysis, Arabic spelling variations due to the use of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and local dialectal Arabic were more prevalent in the data. According to Al-Sabbagh and Girju (2012), spelling variations in dialectal Arabic are mainly "due to [the] lack of standard conventional writing" and the "phonetic and phonological differences between MSA and [dialectal Arabic]" (p. 2884), which result in either retaining the MSA spelling in writing or producing spelling that simulates speech. To overcome the issue of spelling variation, I followed Harvey (2014) suggestion to manually examine the frequency list and use the "find and replace" option on my word processor to unify the spelling of words.

Once organized, the data was processed in the corpus tool and then analyzed following the discourse-historical approach (DHA) (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 2009; Wodak et al. 2009), which is one of the main approaches of CDS. The DHA involves examining three categories. These categories include the thematic contents found in the corpus, the discursive strategies utilized by the Twitter users to legitimize and argue for women driving, and the linguistic means involved in the realization of the contents and discourse strategies (e.g., nouns, adjectives, and the use of passive voice). In the following section, the findings will be presented based on the different thematic contents invoked by the users. Under each theme, the discursive strategies used for argumentation and their linguistic realizations will be discussed.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. Challenging the Religious Establishment

Islam is central to the Saudi Arabian society, so it is unsurprising that the tweets in support of women's right to drive featured a strong religious element. This supports the findings of both

Almahmoud (2015) and Sahly (2016) who also identified repeated references to the religious establishment and religion in general in the data they examined. To understand the centrality of Islam in the Saudi society, one needs to examine its history of state formation, which was shaped mainly by the alliance between Al Saud, the monarch, and Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab who is the leader of the *Wahhabi* (or *Salafi*) movement, which advocates for purifying Islam from innovations and returning to the practices of the Prophet's companions (*Salaf Al-Saleh*) (Niblock 2004). The alliance succeeded in mainly providing the ideological support, which was represented in the Wahhabi's vision of a Muslim community, and the political forces needed to form the state (AlMunajjed 1997). To expand their vision, the religious establishment gained control over many of the country's institutions including the legal and education systems and enforced social conformity and modesty. Women are regarded as one of the key instruments for the creation of the Muslim community. Therefore, control over their dress, behavior, and practices is considered important in maintaining the social order (Al-Rasheed 2013). Their rights and practices are mainly defined, supported, and socially reproduced lawfully and socially, according to the Wahhabi's strict teachings, which results in laws such as sex segregation, guardianship, and the ban on women driving. These laws were enforced to prevent immorality and corruption (AlMunajjed 1997). Therefore, the strict religious interpretations along with their political and institutional support have contributed to the confinement of Saudi women and limited their practices.

Therefore, changing the situation of women requires an examination and questioning of these religious interpretations and practices. This was mostly evident in the corpus around the words الشيخ *Sheikh*, حرام *forbidden*, الدين *religion* and تحريم *forbid*. The analysis of collocates and concordances of these words revealed that one approach adopted by the pro-driving campaign to legitimize their position was the use of intertextual references that approve of women drivers. These references were mostly found around the word الشيخ *Sheikh*, which was found to collocate with the names of several well-known clerics who have publicly approved of and supported women driving.

In contrast with this appeal to religious authority, some eschewed the dominance of the religious establishment altogether by questioning the position and legitimacy of the religious establishment as an all-powerful, all-knowing institution—and, therefore, its relevance in the debate. In this discussion, tension arose from the fact that religious institutions were being criticized without any thought given to the role of religion in molding public life. Inconsistencies and contradictions in scholarly work were used to undermine religious scholarship and far-reaching generalizations labeled scholars as separatists and extremist. This was overtly evident in the use of various referential, predication, and delegitimizing strategies that aimed at negatively representing religious scholars and their views. For example, the words رجال الدين *religious men* or *clerics* was found to be associated with words such as سلطة *oppressive authority*, تجار الدين *merchants of religion*, رعاة الفساد *corruptors*, المتشددين *radical*, المتحذلق *pedantic* and *oppressive authority*, which were all used to criticize the power of religious scholars. The religious establishment was also implicitly referenced using the words باسم الدين *in the name of religion* in which the agent of the action was deleted in order to attribute negative representation to those who interpret religious texts rather than the religion itself, which is an integral part of Saudi identity. What tweeters emphasized and criticized were the actions committed in the name of religion, which were described as فرض *impositions*, اتهامات *accusations*, أساؤ فهم *misunderstanding*, and أساؤ تطبيق *misapplying*.

This approach utilized tweets as more than just a way to criticize the ideology and power structure that limits the lives and even thoughts of women in the KSA. The approach was rather a means of resistance against such power that controls most aspects of their lives. The effort to highlight the fault lines in religious scholarship by condemning the use of religion to dominate and suppress reflects the discourse adopted by many Islamic feminists, which seeks to expose inequalities and discriminatory practices in the interpretations of religious texts (Mir-Hosseini 2006). It is Mir-Hosseini (2006) assertion that the exposure of the inequalities in the interpretations of sacred texts will have consequences for the philosophical understanding of religious scholarship since it affirms that religious interpretations consist of the "views and perceptions of some Muslims and are social practices and norms that are

neither sacred nor immutable but human and changing" (p. 644). Therefore, it enables Muslims to cast off traditional religious beliefs and find new beliefs that coincide with their needs.

Importantly, the tweets posted in favor of women's right to drive in the KSA do not reveal a desire to embrace an anti-Islamic or secular incarnation of authority but instead argue that the right of women to drive can be found within the framework of Islam itself (see Table 1). One may infer from this that most Saudi people continue to "perceive Islam as the stable unchallenged base of their identity and the guideline for everyday life" (Yamani 2000, p. 134). It can also be reflective of an Islamic feminist perspective that does not seek complete democratization but consider women's rights within Islamic teachings which, as Tschirhart (2014) argues, allows Muslim women to "simultaneously affirm their religion and combat oppressions" (para. 12). It is important to note, as Gavrielides (2008), Shotwell (2016), and Johnston and Johnston (2017) do, that social movements can find it difficult to extricate themselves from the power structures they are challenging. This does not suggest that a movement has failed but highlights the need for activists and scholars to carefully reflect on their role and place in the systems they are criticizing and seeking to overthrow. Given this, Almahmoud (2015) and Sahly (2016) argue that the expression of a diversity of views is indicative of the public's desire to interact with and challenge authoritative pronouncements of religious scholars. Tweets in favor of the right of women to drive scrutinize the discriminatory views of the Islamic religious establishment and offer counterarguments that do not necessarily destabilize the Islamic religion that is central to their beliefs. Therefore, the counterarguments become more appealing and acceptable to Saudi society.

Table 1. Examples of normalizing women driving through Islamic discourse.

Translation into English	Examples in Arabic
Women driving is not religiously forbidden. It is okay to drive and do my errands.	سواقة المرأة ماهي حرام وشي عادي أسوق أنا واقضي حاجياتي
A misrepresentation of the Islamic faith, as if religion prohibits women's freedom of mobility.	تشويه للدين الإسلامي كأن الدين حرم المرأة حرية حق التنقل
It is a right that religion does not prevent her from exercising, but there are public opinions on a secular law that is negotiable.	وهو حق لم يمنعها منه الدين بل مزاج شعبي على قانون وضعي قابل للمناقشة
The right of mobility and freedom to drive should be enforced. It is a distortion to the country and citizens and attaching it to religion is a distortion of religion.	حق حرية التنقل و قيادة السيارة أمر لابد من انهاؤه فهو تشويه للوطن و المواطنين و الصاقه بالدين تشويه للدين
It is the law of the jungle which has nothing to do with religion.	انه مجرد شريعة الغاب لا علاقة له بالدين
What provokes me the most is associating the right to drive for women with religion.	أكثر ما يستفزني ربط حق قيادة المرأة للسيارة بالدين
It is her right as other women around the world and there is nothing in the Qura'an or Sunnah prohibiting Saudi women from driving.	حق لها مثل نساء العالمين ولم يرد دليل في القرآن أو السنة يحرم على المرأة السعودية القيادة
A legitimate right and religion does not deny it.	حق مشروع لها والدين لا يمانع
One of her rights that has been high jacked by fatwas, (religious opinions) which have nothing to do with Islam.	من حقوقها تم سرقتها بفتاوى لا تعود للاسلام باي صلة

5.2. Victimization of Women

Those arguing for the right of women to drive often refer to the victimization of women. In this context, the hardships experienced by women including those caused by the ban on women drivers are discussed in a less adversarial and contentious way, which is moving toward humanitarian considerations and away from any desire to antagonize. This theme was most evident in tweets

that mentioned the word "driver." In these tweets, users posted their experiences with hired drivers including the harassment they had received from drivers and the economic burden of having to hire a driver. Several discursive strategies were used to present a negative picture of hired drivers including the use of the words متهور *reckless* and مجرم *criminal*, which undermines the commonly held patriarchal belief that the ban makes women safer and protects their modesty.

The theme of victimization was also evident around the words حق *right*, حقوق *rights*, and حقوقها *her rights*, which refers to driving as a right of women (see Table 2). In the pro-driving tweets, there was a tendency to refer to other rights of women beyond the driving ban. For example, the rights of ارامل *widows* and المطلقات *divorced women* co-occurring with words such as مصادرة *denied*, انتهاك *violated*, and هضم، يهضم *usurped* in order to highlight the general struggle of women and their disadvantaged position. These tweets ascribed responsibility for the disadvantaged position of women differently in their tweets. Nonetheless, the responsibility for the oppression and marginalization of women is laid at the feet of society, the religious establishment, and men. The different sources of oppression identified shows an increased awareness of the various social actors and forces that exert influence on the lives of women.

Table 2. Examples of normalizing women driving through victimization.

Translation into English	Examples in Arabic
The fundamentalists lead the violation of women's rights by considering them Daesh sleeping cells. That is how we fight them with the words that expose them #women_driving	المتزمتين يقودون إنتهاك حقوق المرأة. اعتبرهم خلايا داعشيه نائمة. لذلك فيهم نجاهد بالكلمه التي تعريهم
Real women's rights are not just driving cars. These are just examples of their usurped rights.	حقوق المرأة الحقيقية ليست قيادة للسيارة، هنا مثال على بعض الحقوق المسلوب
Deprivation of rights of divorced women impacts the upbringing of a generation of lost young people who are desperate and depressed and who will be affected.	هضم حقوق المرأة المطلقة يؤثر في تربية اجيال من الشباب الضائع اليائس المحبط الذي سيتأثر
Generations will remember what you did to obtain women's usurped rights in the name of religion and tradition.	ستتذكر الاجيال ما قمتن به لنيل حقوق المرأة المغتصبة بأسم الدين والتقاليد . #قيادة26أكتوبر
#women_driving; the Saudi society deprives women of their rights under the pretext that it protects them while the society stands against #harassment_law and against #women_driving #it is an inverted_society.	#قيادة_المرأة_للسيارة،المجتمع السعودي يهضم حقوق المرأة بحجةالدفاع عنها،بينما يقف ضد #قانون_التحرش وضد #قيادة_المرأة_للسيارة #مجتمع_مقلوب
Fighting women's rights is still ongoing and spreading . . . !! As long as she is deprived of the very basic one which is driving #women_driving.	محاربة حقوق المرأة مازالت مستمره وتتمدد...!! ما دامت محرومة من أبسطها وهي القيادة ! #قيادة_المرأة_للسيارة

It has been reported that women in the KSA do not often officially report harassment because of the lack of clear harassment legislation and women's feelings of shame and concerns about reputation (Awdnews 2017). The anonymity of Twitter, however, offers women and men a safe space to discuss taboo subjects and overcome socially imposed barriers and laws including gender segregation. In the KSA, public discussion of the victimization of women and the experiences of women can counteract the prevailing discourse, which limits women's issues to private spaces. As Arebi (1994) observes, the relegation of women's issues to the private rather than the public sphere is, in fact, inconsistent with the public presentation of women as a symbol of the KSA's dedication to tradition and religion. As AlMunajjed (1997) and Al-Rasheed (2013) argue, the work, education, mobility, and even dressing habits of women have long been subjects of public discussion since these elements signpost the KSA's religious commitment and dedication to a traditional lifestyle. However, AlMunajjed (1997) states that abuse and oppression of women are rarely discussed in the public sphere particularly in conventional media and are considered private issues such as issues to be dealt within families since they are so closely entwined with concepts of honor and shame.

In bringing what is normally hidden into the public sphere, the tweets by those in favor of the right of women to drive emphasize the condition of women as disadvantaged rather than passive. As Talbot (2010) notes, second-wave feminists assert the political nature of every aspect of women's lives. Similar to this movement, the tweets focus on the collective agents not individuals of women's subjugation in social structures to increase awareness and bring change. That is, in adopting Twitter as a platform for their discourse, tweeters supportive of women drivers have created a public space in which they can question accepted and concealed standards and behaviors. While many may argue, as Maglione (2016) does, that presenting women as victims is not always empowering, this research illustrates that the presentation of the victimization of women is vital in destabilizing the prevailing discourse that claims that women are being restricted for their own protection and benefit. The concept of victimhood also reveals that people are becoming more aware of the reality of the lives of women in the KSA while simultaneously revealing the previously unexpressed desire among women for independence.

5.3. Promoting Women's Independence

Twitter users in favor of women drivers also often highlight the role of women in the social and economic development of the KSA. Some tweets claim that progress is being held back by the ban on women drivers. Le Renard (2014) observes that such arguments reflect the ambitions and actions of a government seeking to reform—in this case, one aiming for higher levels of employment among women—and so are considered socially acceptable. In addition, these tweets underline the hypocrisy of calling for women to occupy more professional roles in the KSA as نصف المجتمع *half of the society* while restricting their movement. It appears that women are simultaneously encouraged to participate in public life as well as being prevented from doing so.

Overall, the discussion of women in pro-driving tweets adheres to social norms, which reflects popular ideas about protecting women yet promoting their role in the development of KSA's economy. However, some posts reveal a degree of agency that Butler (1990) would describe as disturbing gender norms and the patriarchy through the demand for equality (see Table 3). These Twitter users do not argue for the right to drive for the sake of women's safety but rather as a right that needs no justification. The right is one that should exist in acknowledgement of the independence of women and their right to make their own decisions. In the corpus, discursive strategies were used to depict women as *decision makers* and *independent people*. The language used includes phrases such as لها الخيار تقود بنفسها او توظف سائق *have the right to choose to drive themselves or hire a driver*, and نرفض *refuse to live as servants*. These tweets are also characterized by the whole-hearted rejection of male authority and control by the patriarchy. Male authority is described as an imposition on women by using a form of العيش فيه كالجواري *humiliation* (e.g., بفرض سيطرته *imposing their authority*) rather than a means of protecting women (see Table 3).

Table 3. Examples of normalizing women driving by promoting women's independence.

Translation into English	Examples in Arabic
#women_driving is a right that we must have whether the motive was a desire or a need, a right is a right.	#قيادة_المرأة_للسيارة حق لا بد نحصل عليه سواء كان الدافع رغبة أو حاجة الحق يبقى حق
#we_will_not_allow_women_to_drive; honestly, this is a strange law . . . women have the right to drive their cars . . . to do her work . . . and develop and build her nation.	لن_نسمح_بقيادة_المرأة_للسيارة قانون غريب بصراحه .. من حق المرأة قيادة السيارة .. لأداء وظائفها .. والرقي لبناء وطنها
Regardless of the imaginary damages, women driving is a legitimate, rational, and vital right. Even if they want to drive and have a driver, it is their right.	بغض النظر عن الأضرار المتوهمة قيادة المرأة للسيارة حق شرعي وعقلي وحياتي حتى لو قادتها وعندها سائق فالأمر حق لها
Women driving is a natural, obvious right and does not need any arguing #women_driving.	قيادة المرأة حق طبيعي واضح لايحتاج إلى جدال #قيادة_المرأة_للسيارة

Table 3. *Cont.*

Translation into English	Examples in Arabic
Regardless of all the necessities and justifications, we simply say: women driving is a natural right for women. #women_driving	، بغض النظر عن كل الضرورات والمبررات وببساطة نقول: قيادة السيارة حق طبيعي للمرأة. #قيادة_المرأة_للسيارة
The right to drive is one of women's rights that was stolen by fatwas, which are completely irrelevant to Islam. We are at a time when we must refuse to live as maids.	حق المرأة بالقيادة ليست الا حق من حقوقها تم سرقتها بفتاوى لا تعودللاسلام باي صلةنحن في زمن نرفض العيش فيه كالجواري
It is about time for women to retrieve their stolen rights and live in dignity and justice and all forms of violation must be stopped. #women_driving	حان الوقت للمرأة أن تأخذ حقوقها المسلوبة وتعيش بكرامة وعدل والقضاء على الإنتهاكات بكل صورها #قيادة_المرأة_للسيارة

Another common feature of pro-driving tweets is the portrayal of women and the promotion of their contributions in ways that depart from gender norms. To achieve this, Twitter users draw a comparison between the situation of women in the KSA and the roles occupied by women, particularly Muslim women, in other nations. For example, this includes their ability not only to drive but to pilot civilian and military aircraft and even spacecraft. These tweeters publicize their support for women and the adoption of a wider variety of roles for women in society and express their frustration with the conservative attitude of the KSA and how this impacts the lives of Saudi Arabian women.

5.4. Reaffirming the Authority of the State

Some of the tweets that support the right of women to drive use the platform to speak directly to the King and to highlight the power of the government to improve the situation of women (see Table 4). This indicates that women's right to drive is an issue to be resolved by the state and this approach suggests that tweeters are inclined to comply with the political system instead of railing against it. Niblock (2004) and Le Renard (2014) note that the government has played a leading role in promoting education, employment, and political participation opportunities for women in its discourse on reform. By emphasizing the government as the KSA's most important voice and fundamental to the advancement of women, Twitter users, with comments such as قرار قيادة_المرأة_للسيارة بيد الدولة #*The decision of #women_driving belongs to the state*, are reaffirming the government's authority and sidelining the input of social groups particularly the religious establishment. In contrast to the antigovernment protests seen in the Middle East in recent years, these Twitter users are on the state's side and are seeking to work with the government by placing the blame on other agents, particularly men and the religious establishment, who must submit to the state's authority.

Table 4. Examples of normalizing women driving by affirming the state's authority.

Translation into English	Examples in Arabic
The decision of #women_driving belongs to the state and not the religion merchants. Once it is approved, women will drive and it will be a great step in boosting the country's economy.	قرار #قيادة_المرأة_للسيارة بيد الدولة وليس تجار الدين بمجرد أن توافق على ذلك ستقود المرأة وسوف تكون خطوة رائعة في رفع أقتصاد *البلد*
Whoever thinks that #women_driving in Saudi Arabia is a community decision is wrong. It is definitely a governmental decision. If the state wants to implement it, then the clerics will bliss it.	قيادة_المرأة_للسيارة بالسعودية قرارمجتمعي فهو مخطأ.هو قرارحكومي بإمتياز.لو ارادت الدولة إنفاذه لبارك الكهنوتيين ذلك
#women_driving is a pure political decision and does not have to do with any orientations. We know that all these orientations will be silenced if the state makes the decision.	قيادة_المرأة_للسيارة قرار سياسي بحت لا علاقة للتيارات به أبدا. نعلم أن كل التيارات تخرس إذا قررت الدولة

Women in several Arab countries have also made similar efforts online (e.g., in Bahrain) and offline (e.g., in Jordan) by approaching their governments and official bodies to protest laws that discriminate against them and to enact political change (Alwadi 2014, Tobin 2014). For women's rights activities, it is vital for government discourse to reproduce the ideology of gender equality since "state policies and civil laws in any country reflect the dominant group's history, ideology, and political interests" (Lorber 2005, p. 148).

Appealing to the authority of the state also brings the pro-driving argument into the dominant discourse of the government. As previously stated, Wodak (2002) asserts that language on its own has no power. Rather, "it gains power by the use powerful people make of it" (p. 10). As a result, to capture people's attention and effect any kind of change, Twitter users who support women's right to drive need their discourse to be promoted and supported by powerful social agents, which includes the state. In this way, the discourse of these tweeters can destabilize the prevailing male-dominant discourse that has prevented women from accessing their rights.

6. Conclusions

This study sought to examine the ways that Twitter users discursively support and argue for the right of women to drive in the KSA within the broader gendered social structure. The results of this study reveal that users in this study who supported the right of women to drive entered into a discourse on the merits of allowing women to drive and highlighted how maintaining the ban constituted prejudice and served to victimize women. They frequently referred to women's rights and emphasized the contradictions that women encounter as a symbolic segment of society who sit at the borderline of the tension between remodeling Saudi Arabia's policies in line with contemporary pressures versus upholding traditional values and patriarchal principles. Tweeters who were pro-driving also exhibited diverse levels of resistance against the institutional and social factors that play a role in controlling the power balance between men and women and influencing women's position in society. In addition to reflecting their wishes for women to be permitted to drive, these stances also called for Saudi society to be fundamentally transformed to redefine the role of women beyond that of symbolic representations of the nation's virtue.

Opinions differ about the extent to which this form of activism is successful offline especially since online users are still monitored and governed by offline regulations. However, Castells (2015) argues that viewing social movements in terms of concrete outcomes promotes a 'self-defeating perspective' and 'capitalist logic', which ignores the slow process of change and how these online negotiations can contest and re-interpret social meanings. The research findings reflect not just efforts to bring awareness to women's disadvantaged situation and promote their agency but also engagement and negotiation of the forms of authority that have long shaped the lives of Saudi women. According to Eickelman and Anderson (2003), the form of mediation created by social media between religious scholars and individuals has now enabled the public to engage in the practice of interpreting religious texts, which was confined to religious scholars and institutions. In addition, positioning online discourse within the socio-political context of KSA can generate significant insight into the ongoing transformation of Saudi society. Saudi Arabian society is primarily composed of youths. This demographic structure in combination with women's awareness of their rights and their efforts to secure better education and career opportunities serves to add to the implications of the online dialogue especially given the absence of alternative methods of communication by which the everyday members of society can express themselves and communicate. Therefore, while Twitter may not be considered a revolutionary tool, the constant negotiation of women's issues and power structures can bring awareness to the disadvantaged situation of women and put pressure on established forms of authority in unprecedented ways.

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